

Animal activists decry shelter

Fund-raising effort for new facility approaching target

By ANNE TRAFTON

The Patriot Ledger

Last summer, Nancy Day spent an hour and a half searching for the owners of a lost dog because she didn't want to take the dog to the town's animal shelter.

"Words don't describe it. It's just horrible," said Day, founder of BARC, an association of Duxbury dog owners.

The 10-by-12 foot shelter, located near the public works garage, has inadequate heating and ventilation, according to Annie Eldridge, chairwoman of the committee raising money to build a new shelter.

"It ought to be condemned," she said.

Eldridge and several other committee members took care of dogs this summer when the heat made the shelter unlivable.

Conditions at the cramped, outdated shelter have been deteriorating for years. Of the four original dog kennels, two are available for dogs, one is used for cats, and another is used for storage.

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Annie Eldridge

The town's animal control officer, Matt Riggins, hired this summer, spent much of the summer cleaning the shelter.

"Thanks to his efforts, the place seems less cramped than it used to," Eldridge said.

A small but dedicated group of Duxbury residents is trying to raise \$100,000 to build a new shelter near the current one.

The fund-raising effort kicked off in 1999 when Aerosmith guitarist Joe Perry and his wife, Billie, Duxbury residents, donated \$25,000. The total now stands at around \$82,000.

Plans for a new 30-by-44 foot shelter are based on the recently opened Kingston Animal Shelter.

"It's going to be very similar to the Kingston shelter, with six dog kennels instead of eight, and a smaller office and smaller reception area," Eldridge said.

Duxbury's animal shelter never holds more than four dogs at a time, according to police records.

"We're making every effort to build a responsible, humane animal shelter, but also one that's affordable and makes sense for the needs of the town," Eldridge said.

The recent opening of the Animal Rescue League shelter in Pembroke has eased the strain. Eldridge says the Duxbury shelter plans to work with the larger Pembroke facility to find homes for abandoned dogs.

"Having that facility definitely takes the pressure off Duxbury," she said.

The committee is hoping to hit its \$100,000 goal by the annual town meeting in March. An additional \$75,000 would come from the public works budget, if approved by the town.

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The committee has two fund-raisers planned for January and February.

On Feb. 9, a cocktail reception and silent auction will be held at the Nathaniel Winsor Jr. House, headquarters of the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society.

Details are still being worked out for a January event that will involve a cooking demonstration by a well-known Boston chef, Eldridge said.

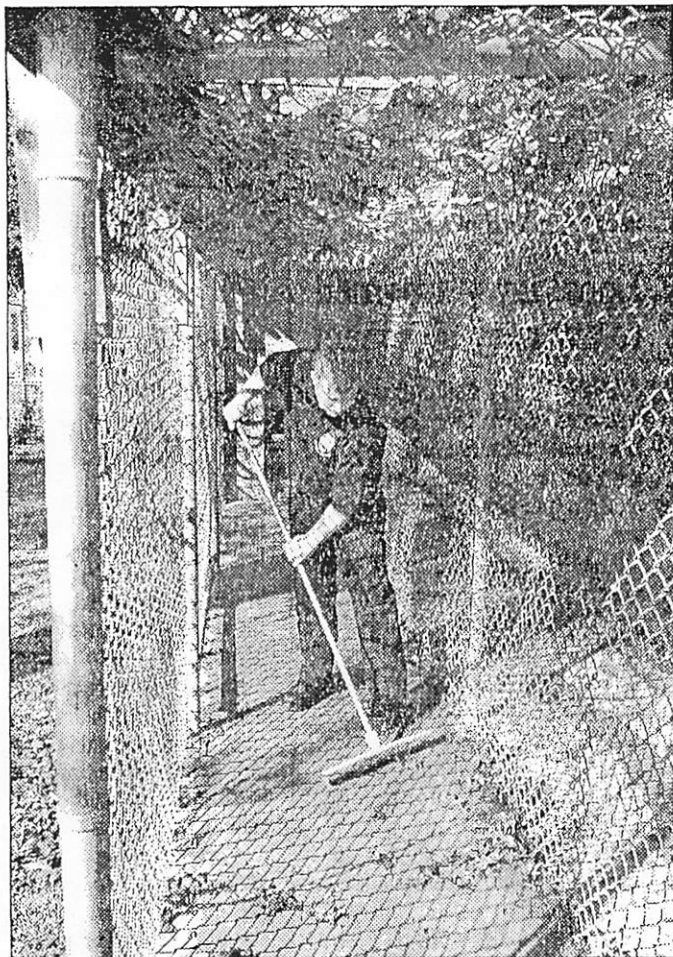
If approved by town meeting, construction could begin in late summer or fall, Public Works Director Thomas Daley said.

In the meantime, Day hopes that no dogs will have to be taken to the current shelter.

"I feel that it's so dire that I don't know what I'm going to do this winter, thinking that there could be dogs over there," she said. "It breaks my heart."

Anyone who wishes to make a donation may send a check made out to Town of Duxbury/Animal Shelter to the selectmen's office at 878 Tremont St., Duxbury 02332.

Anne Trafton may be reached at atrafton@ledger.com.



GARY HIGGINS/The Patriot Ledger

Animal Control Officer Matt Riggins cleans one of the pens at the Duxbury animal shelter. Unhappy with the condition of the shelter, volunteers are raising money to build a new one.